

The Pacific National Bank

HABS No. MASS-938

Head of Lower Main Street at junction of Main, Centre and Liberty Sts.

Nantucket

Nantucket County

Massachusetts

HABS

MASS

10-NANT

54-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

## THE PACIFIC NATIONAL BANK

HABS  
MASS  
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54-

Location: Head of Lower Main Street at junction of Main, Centre, and Liberty Streets, Nantucket, Massachusetts

Present Owner: The Pacific National Bank of Nantucket

Present Occupant: The Pacific National Bank of Nantucket

Present Use: Bank

Brief Statement of Significance: A financial, architectural, and visual landmark in Nantucket town since 1818.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:  
1818 -- Directors and Shareholders of the Pacific Bank purchased land from Dr. Oliver Bartlett. Land had formerly belonged to the heirs of Joseph Gardner. The present building was erected that year.  
1865 to date -- Certified by the Comptroller of the Currency of the Treasury of the United States as the Pacific National Bank of Nantucket.  
(Abstract, Records in Possession of Bank)
2. Date of erection: 1818. In that year the Directors voted to move from their location on Federal Street to the present site, and built the present brick building.  
(Abstract, Bank Records)
3. Architect: Not known. The original estimates for the building are on file at the Bank.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Built of stone and brick, but with details on the cornice and entrance portico executed in wood, the exterior is much the same design as when erected.

The estimate for building, including the vault, was \$7,000.

The main entrance portico, with a curved flight of stone steps and wrought iron hand rail is a fine example of the treatment of the principal feature of a public building of this kind. The only neo-classic details are the Ionic columns in the portico. The recessed

panels in which the windows are set are plain and simple in an Adamesque manner, and the building has an austerity about it which is probably the result of the Quaker influence and the desire for a classic spirit.  
(Abstract, A Mirror of Nantucket by Fowlkes)

5. Alterations and additions: The interior of the Bank has been modernized for enlargement of working facilities. It is now arranged in accordance with the most modern and up-to-date banking practices. However, in making these changes care was taken to preserve the original character of the building.

In 1894, a new vault was installed and 1912, a rearrangement of working space was designed and supervised by Rutan and Ramsdell, architects of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. In 1925, the interior was again remodelled for the same reasons. The outside paint was removed with a torch and the color of the bricks restored to view.

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the institution, in 1954, major structural changes took place in the interior to meet the still growing demand for space. At that time two Nantucket historical murals were unveiled. These were designed by artist Robert Charles Haun and depict life in Nantucket in 1804, the year the Bank received its charter.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: An early history of this Bank is closely connected with the history of whaling, for here over the years whaling masters deposited their profits.

The name of the Bank derived from the fact that Nantucket, at that time the greatest whaling port in the world, obtained most of its wealth and prosperity from the great whaling grounds of the South Pacific.

The building was erected on the site of the Winn house which was moved to the corner of Union and Coffin Streets. The place where the Bank now stands was then known as Hammett's Corner.

During the Great Fire of 1846 the Methodist Church next to the Bank was partially charred but the Bank escaped due to a "God-sent change of wind."

When the building was erected in 1818 the rear part was arranged as the cashier's home. William Mitchell, cashier from 1837 - 1861, set up an observatory on the roof from where Maria, his daughter, on October 1, 1847, discovered a comet, giving her world prominence and launching her career as an astronomer. South of the Bank is a stone in the sidewalk set up by William Mitchell to line with a similar

stone in front of the Fair Street Museum of the Nantucket Historical Association, by which he determined the true north compass bearings in his work of regulating ships' chronometers. These stones still remain as a memorial to the erudite cashier.

It is of interest that the records of the Pacific National Bank have all been safely kept within its vaults to this day. The neatly written pages of these old books are mute evidence of the painstaking care with which the affairs of the Bank have been managed.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: In brochure, published by the Pacific National Bank in 1954; view of Bank in 1831, painted by Hathaway, owned by the Nantucket Atheneum Library; old photo 1870 showing exterior of building before bricks were painted, owned by Bank; old view of front of Bank, One Hundred Years In Nantucket by Inquirer and Mirror Press, 1921; murals on east wall of main banking room depicting Nantucket as it appeared in 1804 before the Methodist Church was built next to the Bank.
2. Bibliography:  
Brock, Albert G. "History of Bank," Proceedings, Nantucket Historical Association, 1904.  
Fowlkes, George Allen. A Mirror of Nantucket. New Jersey, 1959.  
Records of the Pacific National Bank.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin  
Nantucket, Massachusetts  
June, 1966

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, July 1971